BASIC HISTORY

The name *Canada* comes from a [St. Lawrence Iroquoian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St._Lawrence_Iroquoians) word meaning "village" or "settlement." In 1535, inhabitants of the present-day [Quebec City](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quebec_City) region used the word to direct explorer [Jacques Cartier](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacques_Cartier) toward the village of [Stadacona](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stadacona).[[6]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canada#_note-4) Cartier used the word 'Canada' to refer to not only that village, but the entire area subject to [Donnacona](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donnacona), Chief at Stadacona. By 1545, European books and maps began referring to this region as Canada.[[7]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canada#_note-5)

The French colony of [Canada](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canada%2C_New_France) referred to the part of [New France](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_France) along the [Saint Lawrence River](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Lawrence_River) and the northern shores of the [Great Lakes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Lakes). Later, it was split into two British colonies, called [Upper Canada](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Upper_Canada) and [Lower Canada](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lower_Canada) until their union as the British [Province of Canada](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Province_of_Canada) in 1841. Upon [Confederation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canadian_Confederation) in 1867, the name *Canada* was adopted for the entire country, and was frequently referred to as the [*Dominion*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dominion) *of Canada* until the 1950s. As Canada asserted its political autonomy from [Britain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom), the federal government increasingly used *Canada* on legal state documents and treaties. The [Canada Act 1982](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canada_Act_1982) refers only to "Canada" and, as such, it is currently the only legal (and bilingual) name. This was reflected in 1982 with the renaming of the national holiday from [Dominion Day](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dominion_Day) to [Canada Day](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canada_Day).

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Aboriginal and Inuit tradition holds that the [First Peoples](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aboriginal_peoples_in_Canada) inhabited parts of Canada prehistorically. Archaeological studies support a human presence in northern [Yukon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yukon) from 26,500 years ago, and in southern [Ontario](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ontario) from 9,500 years ago.[[8]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canada#_note-6)[[9]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canada#_note-7) [Europeans first arrived](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_colonization_of_the_Americas) when the [Vikings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vikings) settled briefly at [L'Anse aux Meadows](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/L%27Anse_aux_Meadows) circa AD 1000. The next Europeans to explore Canada's Atlantic coast included [John Cabot](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Cabot) in 1497 for [England](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_England) [[10]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canada#_note-8) and [Jacques Cartier](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacques_Cartier) in 1534 for [France](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/France)[[11]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canada#_note-9); seasonal [Basque](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basque_people) whalers and fishermen would subsequently exploit the region between the [Grand Banks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_Banks) and [Tadoussac](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tadoussac) for over a century [[12]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canada#_note-10).

French explorer [Samuel de Champlain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_de_Champlain) arrived in 1603 and established the first permanent European settlements at [Port Royal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Port_Royal%2C_Nova_Scotia) in 1605 and [Quebec City](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quebec_City) in 1608. These would become respectively the capitals of Acadia and Canada. Among [French colonists](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_colonization_of_the_Americas) of [New France](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_France), [*Canadiens*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canadiens) extensively settled the [St. Lawrence River](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St._Lawrence_River) valley, [Acadians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acadians) settled the present-day [Maritimes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maritimes), while [French fur traders](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coureurs_de_bois) and [Catholic missionaries](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ren%C3%A9-Robert_Cavelier%2C_Sieur_de_La_Salle) explored the [Great Lakes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Lakes), [Hudson Bay](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hudson_Bay) and the [Mississippi watershed](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mississippi_River#Watershed) to [Louisiana](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louisiana_%28New_France%29). The [French and Iroquois Wars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_and_Iroquois_Wars) broke out over control of the [fur trade](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fur_trade).

The [English](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_England) established fishing outposts in [Newfoundland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newfoundland_and_Labrador) around 1610 and [colonized](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_colonization_of_the_Americas) the [Thirteen Colonies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thirteen_Colonies) to the south. A series of four [Intercolonial Wars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_and_Indian_Wars) erupted between 1689 and 1763. Mainland [Nova Scotia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nova_Scotia) came under British rule with the [Treaty of Utrecht](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Utrecht) (1713); the [Treaty of Paris (1763)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Paris_%281763%29) ceded Canada and most of [New France](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_France) to [Britain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Empire) following the [Seven Years' War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_and_Indian_War).

The [Royal Proclamation (1763)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Proclamation_of_1763) carved the [Province of Quebec](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Province_of_Quebec_%281763-1791%29) out of [New France](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_France) and annexed [Cape Breton Island](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cape_Breton_Island) to [Nova Scotia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nova_Scotia). It also restricted the language and religious rights of [French Canadians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_Canadians). In 1769, St. John's Island (now [Prince Edward Island](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prince_Edward_Island)) became a separate colony. To avert conflict in Quebec, the [Quebec Act](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quebec_Act) of 1774 expanded Quebec's territory to the [Great Lakes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Lakes) and [Ohio Valley](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ohio_Valley), and re-established the French language, Catholic faith, and French civil law in Quebec; it angered many residents of the Thirteen Colonies, helping to fuel the [American Revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Revolution).[[13]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canada#_note-11) The [Treaty of Paris (1783)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Paris_%281783%29) recognized American independence and ceded territories south of the [Great Lakes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Lakes) to the [United States](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States). Approximately 50,000 [United Empire Loyalists](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Empire_Loyalists) fled the [United States](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States) to Canada.[[14]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canada#_note-moore) [New Brunswick](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Brunswick) was split from [Nova Scotia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nova_Scotia) as part of a reorganization Loyalist settlements in the [Maritimes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maritimes). To accommodate English-speaking Loyalists in [Quebec](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Province_of_Quebec_%281763-1791%29), the [Constitutional Act of 1791](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitutional_Act_of_1791) divided the province into French-speaking [Lower Canada](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lower_Canada) and English-speaking [Upper Canada](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Upper_Canada), granting each their own elected Legislative Assembly.

Canada was a major front in the [War of 1812](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_of_1812) between the United States and British Empire. Its defence contributed to a sense of unity among British North Americans. Large-scale immigration to Canada began in 1815 from Britain and Ireland. The [timber industry](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timber_industry) would also surpass the [fur trade](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fur_trade) in importance in the early 1800s.

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The desire for [Responsible Government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Responsible_Government) resulted in the aborted [Rebellions of 1837](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rebellions_of_1837). [The Durham Report (1839)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Report_on_the_Affairs_of_British_North_America_%281839%29) would subsequently recommend responsible government and the assimilation of French Canadians into British culture.[[15]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canada#_note-ce_durhamreport) The [Act of Union (1840)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Act_of_Union_%281840%29) merged [The Canadas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Canadas) into a [United Province of Canada](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Province_of_Canada). French and English Canadians worked together in the Assembly to reinstate French rights. [Responsible government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Responsible_government#British_North_America) was established for all British North American provinces by 1849.

The signing of the [Oregon Treaty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oregon_Treaty) by Britain and the United States in 1846 ended the [Oregon boundary dispute](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oregon_boundary_dispute), extending the border westward along the [49th parallel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/49th_parallel_north), and paving the way for British colonies on [Vancouver Island (1849)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colony_of_Vancouver_Island) and in [British Columbia (1858)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colony_of_British_Columbia). Canada launched a series of western exploratory expeditions to claim [Rupert's Land](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rupert%27s_Land) and the [Arctic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arctic) region. The Canadian population grew rapidly because of high birth rates; British immigration was offset by emigration to the United States, especially by French Canadians moving to [New England](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_England).

Following several constitutional conferences, the [British North America Act](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitution_Act%2C_1867) brought about [Confederation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canadian_Confederation) creating "one Dominion under the name of [Canada](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canada%27s_name#Adoption_of_Dominion)" on July 1, 1867 with four provinces: [Ontario](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ontario), [Quebec](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quebec), [Nova Scotia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nova_Scotia), and [New Brunswick](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Brunswick).[[16]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canada#_note-12) Canada assumed control of [Rupert's Land](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rupert%27s_Land) and the [North-Western Territory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North-Western_Territory) to form the [Northwest Territories](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northwest_Territories), where [Métis'](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M%C3%A9tis_people_%28Canada%29) grievances ignited the [Red River Rebellion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_River_Rebellion) and the creation of the province of [Manitoba](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manitoba) in July 1870. British Columbia and Vancouver Island (which had [united](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Colonies_of_Vancouver_Island_and_British_Columbia) in 1866) and the colony of [Prince Edward Island](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prince_Edward_Island) joined Confederation in 1871 and 1873, respectively.

[Prime Minister](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prime_Minister_of_Canada) [John A. Macdonald](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_A._Macdonald)'s [Conservative Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conservative_Party_of_Canada_%28historical%29) established a [National Policy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Policy) of [tariffs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tariffs) to protect nascent Canadian manufacturing industries. To open the West, the government sponsored construction of three trans-continental railways (most notably the [Canadian Pacific Railway](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canadian_Pacific_Railway)), opened the prairies to settlement with the [Dominion Lands Act](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dominion_Lands_Act), and established the [North West Mounted Police](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Canadian_Mounted_Police) to assert its authority over this territory. In 1898, after the [Klondike Gold Rush](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Klondike_Gold_Rush) in the Northwest Territories, the Canadian government decided to create the [Yukon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yukon) territory as a separate territory in the region to better control the situation. Under [Liberal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberal_Party_of_Canada) [Prime Minister](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prime_Minister_of_Canada) [Wilfrid Laurier](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilfrid_Laurier), continental European immigrants settled the prairies, and [Alberta](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alberta) and [Saskatchewan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saskatchewan) became provinces in 1905.

Canada automatically entered the [First World War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_World_War) in 1914 with Britain's declaration of war, sending volunteers to the Western Front. The [Conscription Crisis of 1917](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conscription_Crisis_of_1917) erupted when [conservative](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conservative_Party_of_Canada_%28historical%29) Prime Minister [Robert Borden](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Borden) brought in compulsory military service over the objection of French-speaking Quebecers. In 1919, Canada joined the [League of Nations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/League_of_Nations) independently of Britain; in 1931 the [Statute of Westminster](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Statute_of_Westminster_1931) affirmed Canada's independence.

The [Great Depression of 1929](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Depression_of_1929) brought economic hardship to all of Canada. In response, the [Co-operative Commonwealth Federation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Co-operative_Commonwealth_Federation) (CCF) in Alberta and Saskatchewan presaged a welfare state as pioneered by [Tommy Douglas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tommy_Douglas) in the 1940s and 1950s. Canada [declared war on Germany](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_history_of_Canada_during_World_War_II) independently during [World War II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II) under Liberal Prime Minister [William Lyon Mackenzie King](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Lyon_Mackenzie_King), three days after Britain. The first Canadian Army units arrived in Britain in December 1939[[17]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canada#_note-stacey). Canadian troops played important roles in the [Battle of the Atlantic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_the_Atlantic), the failed 1942 [Dieppe Raid](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dieppe_Raid) in France, the [Allied invasion of Italy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allied_invasion_of_Italy), the [Battle of the Scheldt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_the_Scheldt) during the liberation of the [Netherlands](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Netherlands) in 1944. The Canadian economy boomed as industry manufactured military [materiel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Materiel) for Canada, Britain, China and the Soviet Union. Despite another [Conscription Crisis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conscription_Crisis_of_1944) in Quebec, Canada finished the war with one of the largest armed forces in the world.[[17]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canada#_note-stacey).

In 1949, [Newfoundland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newfoundland_and_Labrador) joined Confederation as Canada's 10th province. Post-war prosperity and economic expansion ignited a [baby boom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Post-World_War_II_baby_boom) and attracted immigration from war-ravaged European countries.[[18]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canada#_note-13)

[Quebec](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quebec) underwent profound social and economic changes during the [Quiet Revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quiet_Revolution) of the 1960s. [Québécois](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qu%C3%A9b%C3%A9cois) [nationalists](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quebec_nationalism) began pressing for greater provincial autonomy. The [separatist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quebec_sovereignty_movement) [Parti Québécois](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parti_Qu%C3%A9b%C3%A9cois) first came to power in 1976. A [referendum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Referendum) on [sovereignty-association](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sovereignty-association) in [1980](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1980_Quebec_referendum) was rejected by a solid majority of the population, and a second referendum in [1995](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1995_Quebec_referendum) was rejected by a slimmer margin of just 50.6% to 49.4%.[[19]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canada#_note-dickinson) In 1997, the Canadian Supreme Court ruled [unilateral secession by a province to be unconstitutional](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reference_re_Secession_of_Quebec); Quebec's sovereignty movement has continued nonetheless.[[19]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canada#_note-dickinson)

Under successive [Liberal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberal_Party_of_Canada) governments of [Lester B. Pearson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lester_B._Pearson) and [Pierre Trudeau](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre_Trudeau), a new [Canadian identity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canadian_identity) emerged. Canada adopted its current [Maple Leaf Flag](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Canada) in 1965. In response to a more assertive [French-speaking](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francophone) [Quebec](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quebec), the federal government became [officially bilingual](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bilingualism_in_Canada) with the [Official Languages Act](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Official_Languages_Act_%28Canada%29) of 1969. Non-discriminatory [Immigration Acts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immigration_to_Canada) were introduced in 1967 and 1976, and official [multiculturalism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Multiculturalism#Origins_in_Canada) in 1971; waves of non-European immigration have changed the face of the country. [Social democratic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_democratic) programs such as [Universal Health Care](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medicare_%28Canada%29), the [Canada Pension Plan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canada_Pension_Plan), and [Canada Student Loans](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canada_Student_Loans) were initiated in the 1960s and consolidated in the 1970s; provincial governments, particularly Quebec, fought these as incursions into their jurisdictions. Finally, Prime Minister [Pierre Trudeau](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre_Trudeau) pushed through the [patriation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patriation) of the constitution from Britain, enshrining a [Charter of Rights and Freedoms](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charter_of_Rights_and_Freedoms) based on [individual rights](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Individual_rights) in the [Constitution Act of 1982](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitution_Act_of_1982).

Economic integration with the United States has increased significantly since World War II. The [Canada-United States Automotive Agreement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canada-United_States_Automotive_Agreement) (or Auto Pact) in 1965 and the [Canada-United States Free Trade Agreement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canada-United_States_Free_Trade_Agreement) of 1987 were defining moments in integrating the two economies. [Canadian nationalists](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canadian_nationalism) continued to worry about their cultural autonomy as American television shows, movies and corporations became omnipresent.[[20]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canada#_note-granatstein) However, Canadians take special pride in their [system of universal health care](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Health_care_in_Canada) and their commitment to multiculturalism.[[21]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canada#_note-bickerton)

Canada is a [constitutional monarchy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitutional_monarchy) with [Elizabeth II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabeth_II_of_the_United_Kingdom), [Queen of Canada](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Style_of_the_Canadian_sovereign), as head of state;[[22]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canada#_note-14)[[23]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canada#_note-15) the [Canadian monarch](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monarchy_of_Canada) also serves as head of state of [fifteen other Commonwealth countries](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commonwealth_realm), putting Canada in a [personal union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Personal_union) relationship with those other states. The country is a [parliamentary democracy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parliamentary_democracy) with a [federal system](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federation) of [parliamentary government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parliament) and strong democratic traditions.

[Canada's constitution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitution_of_Canada) consists of written text and unwritten traditions and conventions.[[24]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canada#_note-16) The [Constitution Act, 1867](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitution_Act%2C_1867) (formerly the British North America Act) established governance based on parliamentary precedent "similar in principle to that of the United Kingdom" and divided powers between the federal and provincial governments. The [Constitution Act, 1982](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitution_Act%2C_1982) added a [Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canadian_Charter_of_Rights_and_Freedoms), which guarantees basic rights and freedoms for Canadians that generally cannot be overridden by legislation of any level of government in Canada. However, a [*notwithstanding clause*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Section_Thirty-three_of_the_Canadian_Charter_of_Rights_and_Freedoms), allows the federal parliament and the provincial legislatures to override certain sections of the Charter temporarily, for a period of five years.

The monarch is represented by a [viceroy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viceroy), the [Governor General](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Governor_General_of_Canada), who is empowered to exercise almost all of the constitutional duties of the sovereign, though wielding these powers almost always on the advice of the appointed [Queen's Privy Council for Canada](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Queen%27s_Privy_Council_for_Canada). In practice, the only body to direct the use of the executive powers is the [Cabinet](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cabinet_of_Canada) – a committee of the Privy Council made up of [Ministers of the Crown](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minister_of_the_Crown), all of whom are [responsible](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Responsible_government) to the elected [House of Commons](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_Commons). The Cabinet is headed by the [Prime Minister](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prime_Minister_of_Canada), who holds the conventional position of [head of government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Head_of_government); to ensure the stability of government, the Governor General will usually appoint the person who is the [current leader](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Prime_Ministers_of_Canada) of the political party that can obtain the confidence of a [plurality](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plurality) in the [House of Commons](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canadian_House_of_Commons). The Prime Minister chooses the Cabinet, and by convention, the Governor General respects the Prime Minister's choices. [Michaëlle Jean](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Micha%C3%ABlle_Jean) has served as Governor General since [September 27](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/September_27), [2005](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2005), and [Stephen Harper](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen_Harper), leader of the [Conservative Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conservative_Party_of_Canada), has been her Prime Minister since [February 6](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/February_6), [2006](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2006).

The [federal parliament](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parliament_of_Canada) is made up of the Queen and two houses: an elected House of Commons and an appointed [Senate](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canadian_Senate). Each member in the House of Commons is elected by [simple plurality](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plurality_electoral_system) in a [*riding* or electoral district](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electoral_district_%28Canada%29); general elections are called by the Governor General when the Prime Minister so advises. While there is no minimum term for a Parliament, a new election must be called within five years of the last general election. Members of the Senate, whose seats are apportioned on a regional basis, are chosen by the Prime Minister and formally appointed by the Governor General, and serve until age 75.

Four parties have substantial representation in the federal parliament: the [Conservative Party of Canada](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conservative_Party_of_Canada), the [Liberal Party of Canada](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberal_Party_of_Canada), the [New Democratic Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Democratic_Party) (NDP), and the [*Bloc Québécois*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bloc_Qu%C3%A9b%C3%A9cois). The current government is formed by the Conservative Party of Canada. While the [Green Party of Canada](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Green_Party_of_Canada) and other smaller parties do not have current representation in Parliament, the list of [historical parties with elected representation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_political_parties_in_Canada#Historical_parties_that_have_won_seats_in_Parliament) is substantial.



